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## **The Return to Olympus**

By ROGER L. SERGEL

"O bright Apollo, God of gladdening light,  
Son of earth-born, beautiful Latona  
And Zeus the Father of Gods, have pity on me  
Earth-born, as was thy mother: hear my prayer,  
And help me endure very patiently  
Within this little place, this weary place  
Of fenced and parceled fields,—and, presently  
To find a way out to the lovely world,  
As far perhaps, as thine own Greece. And then,  
So thou help'st me in this, I'll learn to pray  
To thee in thine own Greek, the tongue of Gods.  
And I will make a little offering  
Of love; and too, a little prayer some day  
In one of thy dishonored temples. And  
Thou shalt know worship once again, in the land  
That in the days before it turned from thee,  
Thou mad'st the light of all the world. Surely  
It is a little thing for thee to hear  
And grant, the prayer of just one worshipper;

For after all, that which I ask of the world  
Is chiefly, just one friend who understands  
And loves the things I understand and love,  
One friend revering things that I revere.  
So much to me, so often lonely, and  
Forever powerless,—to thee—so little,  
O bright God, forever powerful!”

The murmurous bosoms of the trees bent low  
About the dreaming, praying little girl  
Who held her white arms out so yearningly  
To let the streaming sunlight of the God  
Fall warm upon her breast. And as she prayed  
The winds curled through the trees more silently,  
The happy brook from chuckling turned to song  
And hummed approval to itself. A birch  
Was sweet with snowier light; its fragile leaves,  
Half-misted, twirled more tenderly. The day  
Poured luminous little pools on grass and trees.

A child's heart turned to dead Gods for relief;  
A little pagan in a prairie town  
Could worship no stern God in absent heavens,  
But loved the God within the light; dryads  
That should have danced from every tree; the  
    nymphs  
That should have sported in the brooks; and all  
The ancient deities her playmates scorned,  
And laughed at when she spoke of them, and called  
Her “Atheist” and “Infidel,” and told  
Their parents of the queer beliefs that one,

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Their playmate, found so beautiful and true.  
So she, the scorned, the laughed- and jeered-at one  
Spoke not at all of older deities,  
But in her ancient little heart beheld  
Diana in the moon, and in each tree  
Its lithesome dryad; in each brook its nymph.  
“Who would deny one tree its dryad, or  
One brook its nymph?” she asked herself, and found  
No answer to forgive the sacrilege  
Her playmates had committed by their jeers.  
And as the weeks passed by she spoke no more,  
Even to her mother, of her loneliness.  
And then one rainy evening she had read  
That not one person in the wide wide world  
Now worshipped the old Gods of Greece. The words  
Had stung her, for it seemed so pitiful  
That no one in the wide world worshipped them,  
Not one to honor or revere, not one  
To keep the Gods enthroned, Olympus, great.  
And so at last she knelt in woodland spaces  
To pray to that bright God she loved the most:  
She prayed as best she knew, and tried to speak  
With proper reverence in slow-toned words  
Such as the ancient heroes might have used,  
And did use in the books she knew so well,—  
The books where Homer sang so mightily.

## II

Upon a gray Olympus all was bare;  
Low-sagging wastes of clouds oppressed the place.  
There was no hint of glory and no sign

That this was once the home of living Gods.  
Five barren and tremendous ridges lay  
Amongst the dingy clouds, their dingy snows  
Encircling in a dead depressing calm  
The topmost shafts of rock, where once for Zeus  
A heaven-towering temple rose in joy.  
No calm, clear radiance lived about the mount  
As in the ancient days; but air gray-hued  
With fogs from lifeless snows, encompassed all.  
The Gods had vanished years and years before,  
When one, the last despairing worshipper,  
Had died within the dark. No more the breath  
Of God-tongued speeches stirred. No breath, no life,  
But gray oppressive calm, and mists and fogs,  
Sad, sluggish, sullen things . . . but . . . suddenly:

Thundering down on Olympus,  
Thundering down on Olympus,  
As out of the darkness the lightning lashes instant  
day on the world,  
So out of the skies and grayness  
On Olympus the God-day was hurled:  
Came flame and the glory of morning  
Forerun by a hail of light—  
That pelted the peaks and their drabness  
With a shrill and a maddening white;  
That rained on the whiteness the flamings  
Of the petals of day and of dawn;  
And then to the white in its trembling  
The hailing of light strewed on

The flowers of other-day sunsets,  
Of sunrises man never saw,—  
The savage red blossoms of dawns  
That burned before man or his awe;  
Sunset sweeps of color  
Breaking apart to show through  
Quickening fountains of topaz,  
Flying silver and blue.

Then out of the surge of the wave-flames,  
Out of their splendid might,  
And out of the rocks—leapt a temple  
Shaped from the life of the light—  
Out of the rocks to the heavens  
Out of the light through the sky  
Sprang the towering temple,  
The impalpable walls of the temple  
That the Gods and men live by.  
The Gods in their throned high places  
Ordained that the tides of song  
Reverberant through earth-spaces  
Should cleanse the ages of wrong.

Then a chorus of timeless triumph,  
A thunderous soaring of song  
Swelling, mounting, up-welling,—  
Held high the God-words for long,  
Till descending and blending, blending,  
To valley and mountainous ground  
The God-tongued words came falling,—  
Showering stars of sound.

“Found! Found! Found!  
After the ages without you,  
Found! Found! Found!  
Splendor is flaming about you!  
Sing, O heart of me, Sing!  
Fling, O soul of me, Fling!  
Fling far,  
Cares to the chaos of Past!  
Bound, O heart of me, Bound!  
Sound, O soul of me, Sound!  
Sound far,  
The wonder of worship at last!”

And echoing and ringing, echoing afar,  
Through the spaces palpitating to the farthest star,  
Mystic tones of olden time in syllables of thunder  
Down mountain-sides tremendously descending,  
woke the wonder  
In hearts of everything that lives upon the earth or  
under.

Voluminous, voluptuous,  
The surge of that triumphing sound  
Sung to men as it flung the men  
From shaken and urgent ground,  
A song of escape from credal tombs,  
A sunrise of sound in prisoning glooms—  
And maddened men in its maelstrom  
Of resonance profound,—  
Voluminous, voluptuous  
Surging of triumphing sound.

Then to the trees the dryads danced down,  
Naiads danced into brooks once more.  
The satyrs regained their naughty renown  
And never a scampy trick forebore,  
Teasing and pestering mortal man,—  
And the land was awake to the great God Pan.

In valley and dell irresistibly  
There followed the rippling melody,  
Notes that showered as glowingly  
As showers of stars on a sunset sea;  
And tones that foamed from lyrical throats,  
Flickering, fanciful, fairy notes  
That danced in a delicate revelry  
Over pearl-white streams to the seas and boats.  
The land was a-thrill with its life; all men  
Knew the Gods were enthroned on Olympus again.

### III

Within a far, prosaic western land,  
A little pagan of a prairie town  
Arose from supplication in surprise.  
“Where? I do not see you, yet you spoke.  
O Friend of Mine, play no such tricks with me!  
It is a time too holy now. You come—  
So quickly; and Apollo is so good  
To answer my small prayer as soon as this.”  
She spoke, and touched the birch beside her hand.  
“O Friend, I heard your voice, so clear, so true;  
Where are you, Friend?”

“Beside you; you now hold  
My hand in yours,” the clear-toned answer came.  
“Your hand? O Dryad of the Birch-tree,—Oh—  
I did not think Apollo would permit  
A little mortal girl like me, to have  
A dryad for a friend. Yet friend you are,  
And far more beautiful than I had dreamed.  
And surely you will understand and love  
The things I understand and love; revere  
What I revere. But Dryad, tell me, please,  
Why bright Apollo answers prayers so soon?”

“Because, Girl-heart, that one who rightly prays  
With deep belief within his heart, shall find  
A God to answer, since true worship thrones  
The wandering Gods and gives them life again.  
Man justly feels the Godhead in himself,  
Yet must he see,—if Life awakes in him,  
The freer, farther splendor of the Gods.  
And Gods of Greece! You were not dead, you live  
Forever in the temples of mankind;  
And whoso finds that you are still alive  
Within the sun, the moon, the earth, the seas,  
Has found that miracle of living might,  
Too powerful for its sole self, which breaks  
In thousand-flashing lightnings through the world,—  
In nights, despairs, and wars, in triumphing  
Fierce beauties of the day, in stars, in sun  
And sunset, ocean, and rose-gleaming waves,  
In every pulse of life, each brook, each tree,  
And in the grass so little and so eager—



Gods of Greece! You are not dead, you live  
When just one little girl is sorrowful  
That no one in the wide world worships you!"

The Dryad and the Girl were far away—  
But through the prairie woodlands to the birch  
That listened by the brook, the song-notes came  
Of far-off misty nights beneath the stars,  
Of rose-rolled skies and the dreaming of the sea,  
And twilight dancers gleaming through the dark,  
The laughs of satyrs, melodies of Pan.

## **The Truth about Keene Abbott**

My friend's name is Keene Abbott; my name is my own affair—and the editor's. When the editor wrote to me, "Some one ought to tell the truth about Keene Abbott,—will you do it?" I replied that, under the aegis of anonymity, I would tell that truth. Furthermore, I will.

When I first knew Abbott, people were lifting their eyebrows about him. He was a new-come student at the University of Nebraska; I was a student of a little more experience and, in my own view, of vastly deeper wisdom. I don't know how it happened that in so brief while people discovered Abbott's presence, but when I first knew him, a few weeks after the opening of the fall term, eyebrows, as I have said, were already lifting at the mention of his name and folks were emphatic in the opinion that he had come to the wrong place. To a bookish and slow person like myself this was a sufficient intimation; so I proceeded to look up this Keene Abbott.

My discovery was a youth of remote aspect and an inconsequential frame of mind. He was obviously profoundly puzzled with the contents of his textbooks and profoundly relieved to lay them aside. It was that late evening hour when all good students are assiduous in their bookish devotions, but Keene (as I must call him) stayed not for these: Had I been down to the viaduct at just this witching hour and seen the nocturne of the freight-yards? No? Well, this is the time and tide of enchantment,—a

world of moving shadows and black silhouettes, spangled all over with lights red and white and green and yellow, and wraithed above with fantastic smoke and geysers of ruddied steam. Come, and come now. . . . It was perfectly clear that Keene Abbott recognized none of the categorical imperatives that make up the Good Student. Not the lesson of the Morrow but the vision of the Now was what moved him, not the solemn consequence of one's position in society, but the inconsequence of Beauty. To my rigidly logical mind this was bewildering, but it was consoling to know that my wisdom was needed,—so we went out into the night together.

## II

As a student Abbott was a fine failure. He consistently treated his classes (that is, those he was about for), never as duties, but always as opportunities or bores, as the case appealed. I do not think that he was ever able to appreciate the significance of 'flunking' and 'passing,' though I labored heavily to expound their profundities. And he developed the odd habit of using the library for his own private pleasure and profit. He was always reading things that no other student thought of reading,—books entirely irrelevant to any university course. Class-gongs would sound and students come and go; he would read on undisturbed in mind. Bye and bye, an intruding mentor (which might be myself) would remind him of the lost hour. . . . Is it so, indeed? Too bad. But the book—this is

just great—this book! . . . And with his incurable irrelevance he would go on about it, making the mentor quite forget his mentorship.

Then there was his uncanny habit of walking the night. At all times he loved to walk—loafing with his soul, as Walt Whitman would say,—seeing all things with the strange intimacy of the impractical gaze. It was not the commotion down the street that he was interested in—though that, too, was not beyond his interest,—but the little girl with the torn pinafore and smudged face who stuck out her tongue at you and giggled, or the fool dog that went to sleep on the street-car track, or just the glint of the sinking sun on the glazing of a factory—so blank and idiotic. At all times he loved this loafing with the soul, but most of all at night. In the daytime, I suspect, there were too many practical people abroad, and too many lifting eyebrows.

I remember well enough one of those night walks. Keene had found a wonderland—far down Salt Creek—where there were fields and fields of moon-flowers. We started out near midnight and made our way, beyond the distantly twinkling city, through trees and underbrush and creekside mud out to the enchanted meadows. The moon was shining gloriously and the mosquitoes were villainous and the whole atmosphere was musky and dense with late June, when at last we came to the magical fields. There was nothing of consequence followed on this. We talked about many things, none of which I remember. It was all a part of Abbott's inconsequen-

tiality, no adventure about it, nothing but moonflowers,—and I am sure that I shall never forget those moonflowers, spectral and waxen under their mother moon.

It was Abbott's good luck that he found and was found by a teacher while he was at the university. There are many instructors and many lecturers in universities, but there are not so many teachers. Instructing and lecturing are easy, like giving advice; teaching is more difficult; for a teacher must be able to find and see people, not merely to talk to students—or against time. The name of this particular teacher shall be as securely anonymous as my own; but their mutual discovery was the making of Abbott's university career, and I suspect that it had a lot to do with the making of Abbott. Of course there were contributory factors—among them that he (later) married a wife, a woman gifted with just such an intimate and sympathetic gaze into the heart of things as is his own, as all who have read the stories written by 'Avery Abbott' will know. I even like to plume myself that my own solemn exhortations were more effective than my friend's inattention might imply. But be all this as it may, the primary fact remains that wife and teacher and friends would have made nothing of him if Keene Abbott had not been born with genius. That is the beginning of the truth about him.

### III

Style in writing, as we all know, is taught by the rhetoricians. The other people who teach style are

editors and experts in the psychology of advertising. The sterling qualities of style, as I recall, are Clearness, Force, and Elegance (I always think of them with these capitals and as 'sterling'). Clearness, of course, consists in saying familiar things in a familiar manner; to be clear one need only say what is obvious—or what passes as obvious,—and if you can do this with a touch of flattery, by all means go into politics; you are made for the rostrum. Force is better known nowadays by its *nom de guerre*, 'punch;' if you can write with 'punch,' you are 'great stuff'—a proper literary 'pug.' Elegance—well, to me at least it calls to mind an immaculate, frilled cuff barely revealing the manicured fingers which airily clasp the goose-quill.

Now my opinion is that Abbott has never mastered Clearness, Force, and Elegance. From the first of my acquaintance with him he has persisted in saying familiar things in an *unfamiliar* manner—in a challenging, tantalizing, illogical manner, that no one could possibly call commonsensical. The truth is that he is always writing about familiar things as if they were the most novel and interesting things in the world,—and, incidentally, he is making you believe that they are so. How often have I assured my friend that his verbal collocations are impossible! and how often has he meekly substituted aggravations of the impossible! and how often have I been forced to the sad conviction that it is his mind that isn't 'just right!' Folks don't lift their eyebrows for nothing. . . . There is a story of

Abbott's (his only published book, I believe) about a little boy of four who needed a father and a mother and found them—just like Keene to be interested in a boy like that! He called this story "A Melody in Silver." As if *melody* is colored! A logical writer inspired with a proper detestation of the mixed metaphor, could never have tolerated this; he would have called it "A Minor Melody" for the sake of the alliteration, or a "B Flat" or a "C Sharp" for the sake of the moral implications of these phrases. And the logical writer would, in consequence, never have inspired an artist, by his mere title, to create the lovely little study of silvery birches in a mist of blues and greens and delicate grays which now opens a window of faery into Abbott's study. It is something to be able to kindle the imagination by a mere title.

Again, Abbott persistently misses 'punch' in his stories. My general impression of contemporary style is that it is always going off like scattering musketry—popping and blazing away, full of detonations and pyrotechnics, three baggers and home runs, and a general capacity for enforcing the conviction that Bow-wow, Pooh-pooh, and Ding-dong, if not the origins of language, will surely be its ends. Abbott is short on punch. I do not recall a hair-raiser in any of his stories. As I have said, he persists in writing about familiar things; and somehow expletives and explosives and verbal attitudinizing aren't in place. But it is odd how those familiar stories grip the heart in spite of the lack—the little

girl who loved being loved by the motherly country aunt better than all the gew-gaws of city wealth, the young newspaper man who came home to his village sweetheart to find that the fame she had sent him out to seek was somehow less consequential to both of them than were they to each other, the old Geronimo by the roadside destroying the dolls he had bought for his little Apaches because they were the white man's make—the hated white man! Keene Abbott likes to interest men and women in such punchless tales as these.

I think I'll pass up Elegance, for I'm quite sure that Abbott's style is not manicured (though his nails may be). The important point is that he has a style. It isn't rhetorical in any of the customary senses; that is clear. But as I cast about, I recall something that Longinus says about style being in the best and truest sense the light of the mind. That seems just to fit Keene Abbott's case: he has a style which plays over the familiar themes of everyday life with a lucent and subtle illumination. It is more than sentiment, though it is, in the best sense, that fusion of feeling and thought which we call sentiment; it adds to this what I should like to call psychological insight—if the word 'psychological' were but less ignominiously misused nowadays. For my friend has a rare power of feeling what other men feel—and women, too, and children perhaps most of all,—coupled with the power of expressing this feeling as few of our dumb human mates can express it. It is a light of the mind, but it is love from the heart,



too,—as is all compassionate intelligence. From Abbott's first story, "The White Glory," which appeared in *McClure's* in 1903 (when the name "McClure" still stood for something) on to—and past—the little masterpiece, "Maybe Wild Parsnips," printed in *Harper's* a couple of summers ago, these two qualities of human sympathy and humane comprehension have been manifest in everything that he has published;—and in my opinion (which I shall make assertive, since its expression is anonymous), these are just the qualities that make great literature.

#### IV

I do not mean to say that Abbott has achieved greatness. Personally I am somewhat suspicious of the short story: I have my doubts as to its capacity to produce that final purification of experience which Aristotle would make the test of artistic excellence. Much the short story can do. It can imitate life with local intensity, portraying human nature and human passion searchingly; but there is a double truth in nature—man's and all—which can best be shown in broader modes, where the context and setting of life are made big and comprehensive. A certain epic sweep of action, a period of slow-assembling force, deliberate as the history of the world is deliberate, impress me as essential to true sublimity in literature; and it is just this deliberation of movement that the short story lacks; it is swift and intense. This is my general conviction in respect to short stories as compared with the longer forms of

fiction; and I am therefore chary of assertion in respect to a literary character based (as Abbott's is) solely upon the short story form.

And yet, I gladly confess, certain stories by my friend show, even in their brief compass, a truly epic power. "Maybe Wild Parsnips" is such a story. The theme of "the Melting Pot" is here presented, not on the turbid background of city life, but in the simplest of rural scenes; yet with a comprehensiveness and power which go far beyond the form of nationality into that heart of man's universal nature which is the sure foundation upon which the America of the future will be built. That theme is in itself epic in greatness—it means not merely a nation, but a continent in formation; and when a man like Abbott sees the process of the amalgamation of race in the countryside feud of his German and Bohemian farmer neighbors, he is treating the problem, as I conceive, in just the context which must offer its final solution; for from the beginning of time the spiritual as well as the material sustenance of nations has been drawn from the country, the peasantry,—and so it will be to the end.

Epical, too, is "The Wind Fighters," published in *The Outlook* last January. There are a few writers—Thomas Hardy is a great example—who can so interweave the life of man in the life of nature that the fabric is indiscernible. Of this great mother Earth of ours, with her swinging seasons, her winds and weathers, her growths and decays, we are more a part than we often realize, lost as we customarily

are in the transient fussiness of our small egos. It is the hand and the eye of the poet and the artist that waken us most intimately to consciousness of our weak dependence upon her from whose body we are born and into whose dust we must return. Here is the true epic—the life of man caught in the mightier life of nature,—so implacably indifferent to his little boastful masteries! My friend Abbott sees this, instinctively, perhaps as a part of his sympathy for human nature; for it is impossible for a man deeply to know mankind without also deeply knowing the world. “The Wind Fighters” is a fragment of that endless struggle of life and death which on our Plains is so often the strife of green things to resist the drought. The story ends with a description of the coming of the rain—a description which, for me, reaches sublimity in literature. Possibly my native acquaintance with the thing—those majestic sudden storms which so awed the hearts of the first travelers to our Plains—adds a quality which a less familiar mind might not discover; but making all allowance for this, I still feel that in these few paragraphs Keene Abbott has certified his powers both as a descriptive artist and a prophet of nature.

And here I should like to make a bit of prediction. “The Wind Fighters” deals with the transformation of the Middle West from virgin prairie into fruitful fields. Do we realize what a stupendous theme is here? The generation in which we live—for the pioneers and the memories of pioneer days are still with us—is the crux of the history of our continent.

Thousands of years lie behind it and thousands of years are to come, and our day is a dividing time, an era marking an immense and sudden transition from Past to Future. Gone forever are the days of the great herds and the untouched sod; beyond the prospect of thought the Plains are destined to be a village-dotted expanse of cultivated fields, furnishing food for mankind. No such change on such a scale has ever before taken place in the world; none such can again take place while earth's continents hold their assigned forms, for there is no equal portion of the habitable globe left virgin. Is not this a theme to stir the imagination and rouse the spirit? Is it not one of the great stories of all time?

My prediction is that my friend Abbott will compose one of the big chapters of this tale. It must be written in our day, by men and women with sensitive memories and an understanding of human nature and an understanding of the Plains,—with gifts such as are his. It must have unity and breadth and majesty, the great freedom of a land that is all-horizoned; and it must have tenderness for little things. The short stories, with their brief intensities of episode and scene, are fine training for this, but the great work itself will be many-paged and manifold in its revelation of life, man's and nature's. Some day, I predict, Abbott will write such a book; it may not be read by the 'big sellers' public of the hour,—but what of the uncounted future to which this story must be forever fresh and wonderful?

## **The Unlifted Latch**

By BURTON KLINE

Some day, if a great hope of mine were to be realized, I should perform the marriage ceremony under circumstances at once the oddest and the most gratifying. So would end the strangest experience of my clerical life. The wedding, when it occurs, is to be in a little house of bewildering beauty—a flawless setting for a romance so far out of the common. There are houses that frown, that arch their backs, forbidding houses, peevish houses—many of them, I suspect, a pretty accurate reflection of the people who own them. But there are also houses that smile. And this one which I have so oddly acquired is one of them.

It is of the simplest design, and there is something of shyness about it. Its casement windows are like great wistful eyes. Down-stairs there is probably one large living-room—I say probably, because so far I have not set foot inside my house. But I have confidence in that living-room. I know it has a fireplace, and an inglenook, and possibly window-seats. And of course there is a dining-room, an intimate little dining-room, with its attendant pantries. It is absolutely my life-long dream of a house, in its neat brown shingles—a gem in a setting that suits it perfectly. About it there is a lawn with a single umbrella of an elm hoisted in one corner. In the other corner is a tiny garage, which I might use as a study. And about the plot is a neat box hedge.

I remember the evening, soon after coming to the parish, when I first passed the little place and stood in the moonlight, sinfully wishing it were mine. (I am myself to be married before long, please God, and must have a house till my parish can build me one.) The neighborhood was still; the good folk had long gone to bed; when I was startled to see a light burst from one of those casement windows. It was like seeing a corpse come to life. Till that moment the place had seemed so utterly vacant, so almost mine. Then came the light, with its token of ownership, to give me a pang of jealousy. I turned home in half a pet, but determined to know what lucky (and perhaps unworthy) mortal did own and inhabit it.

And eventually I did learn as much as any one knew of it and of its owner. The property looked new, it was always so neatly kept. Always the lawn was trimmed and the walks swept; but always, too, the windows were closed, the blinds drawn, and the house had an air of vacancy. And what was my surprise to be told that it had remained in that identical state for eight or nine years. It had been built—no one knew why—by a man whom few of the townspeople had ever seen. He rarely visited the house, and then chiefly at night, or sometimes on Sunday.

In time I gleaned more information of this strange absentee owner. Outside his office he appeared to have no interest but this house. It was he himself who kept it in order. Through windows left unguardedly open, passersby had caught occasional

peeps at him, dusting and sweeping. He was simply a Mr. Williams, book-keeper in an insurance office in the city; and these were his curious habits.

But why should that man have kept up that empty house for all these years?

I puzzled over this Mr. Williams more than any one knew. It was clear that something was amiss with him; and since the seeking out of sore hearts seems to me one of the very first of a clergyman's duties, I laid a sort of ambush for Mr. Williams. His sorrows were so invitingly out of the ordinary; he was such an interesting "case." But soon other cares invaded my curiosity about him, what with the number of sick and destitute in my parish. Their difficulties would have overwhelmed me but for the generous helpers who gave me money when I needed it, and discovered homes for my orphans, and at length founded the trade school for boys from which I expected so much, and which gave me such trouble with the trade unions.

I began to have nightly visits from union members who came to object. One Tuesday evening especially I remember, when the bell at my lodging was rung by a man who would tell the maid nothing more than that he very much wanted to see me. I asked him up, and there stumbled over my threshold a tall and awkward fellow whom I thought I recalled among our trade union critics. He was lean and angular; his sleeves were too short, and his trousers seemed to be permanently crooked at the knee. He had a small and sharp face, a long pointed nose, gray eyes

that were keen and peering, and a thick shock of yellow hair. His skin, too, was sallow. He seemed a study in saffron.

He smiled uneasily, wearily, and began, "I—I—" and laughed in embarrassment.

"Good evening, sir!" I said. "Come in and have a chair. A bit chilly for this time of year, isn't it?"

The man came in, plunged rather than sat in my Morris, and said:

"Yes; it is a bit chilly for this time of year,"—and said nothing more.

"And isn't it dusty!" I added, trying to help him along.

"It's thirty-two days since we had any rain," he replied, after a moment. "And that was only a shower."

"Indeed!" I said. "I knew it was a long time."

Such was the quality of our conversation—very much like the weather which formed the bulk of it. My caller was the shyest man I had ever seen—very evidently no trade unionist; but we of the clergy are accustomed to odd visitors, we doctors of the heart; and this one, I took it finally, was the usual case of distress. Indeed, as the evening wore on, there began to be plain the stress that was on him. My visitor bit his nails, and said nothing but "Yes" and "No," in the wrong places. He came at eight, and at eleven he was there still. At length, in despair, I said:

"Don't you think a short walk would be fine in this air? I always like a brisk stroll before going to bed."



And we went out and up the street, with the labor of talking still falling upon me. Soon we turned, repassed my door, and walked a corresponding distance down the street. There I halted and held out my hand.

"Here I must say good-night, Mr.—ah—?" I said.

"Williams is my name," the man replied. "I—I hope I haven't bothered you. But I saw a light in your windows as I came past; and I—I thought I'd come up and see you."

"I am glad you did, Mr. Williams," I managed to say. "And I hope I gave you a comfortable evening. Come again—whenever you see the light. Good night, Mr. Williams."

"Good night, Mr. Wiggin. And I'm—I'm very much obliged to you." And I recall being surprised at the emphasis that he threw into the words.

So this was Mr. Williams, who owned the house! . . . .

Precisely fourteen evenings after that he called again, as preoccupied as before, and I had to toil even harder to entertain him. Twice I was amused at an impulse in me to blurt out, "Mr. Williams, at what figure will you rent that pretty little house of yours to a young bride and groom?" But there was something about him that discouraged such fooling.

Mr. Williams began to excite me. That second evening he seemed to throw out several efforts toward confession, vague, yet appealing. I felt stricken that I had not done more to assist him. Yet it turned out that he needed no help. The next time

he called—on his regular Tuesday evening—he fairly dominated the conversation. Among other things, we came to discuss the danger of misjudging people from appearances. It was Mr. Williams who raised the subject, and he cited an instance.

“Now there was Frank Bosworth,” he said. “I used to think that fellow was a fool—but one day he and I went swimming; and what do you think I saw! Why, a silver locket that he wore next to his skin. That fellow wearing a locket, mind you! And I had a good guess what was inside it, too,” Mr. Williams laughed. “I thought different of that fellow ever afterward.”

Mr. Williams was silent for a little, and then he added, “Yes, sir! I sort of knew him better.”

Mr. Williams was himself startled at hearing himself divulge so much, and studied me narrowly to watch its effect. And then he ventured more:

“I knew him better because . . . because I wear a locket myself.” . . .

When he had left that evening I could see what the man had been doing with me all along. From his first call he had been carrying on a difficult campaign of acquaintance. He had been training me, preparing me to be the recipient of a confidence. Mr. Williams was a man who wore a locket! But the last time he called, he confided more, much more.

I was now expecting Mr. Williams on every second Tuesday evening. This last one was a bleak and rainy night in December. The wind made wild music with the harps in the bare trees. And Mr. Williams was so late in coming that I grew uneasy.

When he arrived his appearance justified my alarm. His trousers were spattered with mud, and his yellow hair matted with perspiration. Panting, excited, tired, without a word he flung himself into a chair and was some minutes in recovering.

"Do you remember . . . the first time . . . I came here?" he gasped out at last. "You remember I had been passing . . . and noticed your light? Well . . . that saved my life. You've been a light to me!"

He had put me in a tremble. The great burst was coming, I knew. Already it had made a poet of Mr. Williams. I was a light to him.

"Yes," he panted on. "You've been my light. When I left you that night I said I was much obliged to you. Well, that was the truth. Do you know where I was going? Why, down to that house of mine . . . that everybody laughs at. You've heard about it, of course. The children on the street plague me about it. Well, I was going there . . . do you know why?"

Mr. Williams drew from his pocket a small bottle bearing a red label. "Laudanum!" he smiled, significantly. "Tooth-ache, you know!" he grimaced. "I was going to cure it, you know. And in the morning they would have found the house in ashes, and my bones among them. They . . . they never could let me alone!"

I tried to say something, but Mr. Williams plunged on.

"Of course that was not the real reason why I was

going to do it. They couldn't laugh me into it. I'm not such a baby as that."

I knew that. We were coming to the core of things, clearly. "I'm glad you didn't 'do it,' Mr. Williams," I tried to say. "It's always a mistake."

"Yes," he said, "I was glad too. I was glad until to-night. I liked coming here. I . . . I liked your light. You don't know what it has meant to me. I've walked by here on odd evenings, just to look at it. But the whole thing came over me again this afternoon . . . the ashes and bones proposition . . . and I almost put it through. But I thought of you again, and that saved me; and I ran across lots over here as fast as I could."

Sitting quietly in a chair was by then impossible for Mr. Williams, and he started up and began pacing the floor.

"Of course you know who I am," he began in earnest. "I'm a book-keeper in an office, that's all. It's all I've ever been; that's the trouble! I was only a book-keeper in an insurance office, and had yellow hair, and skinny legs. That didn't matter at first. We were both young, then; and my job looked good, and the yellow hair didn't matter. Did it, Nellie, hey? It wasn't till— My God, what am I saying!" Mr. Williams cut himself short.

I had been forgot by then; other figures and other scenes were more vividly before him. "Excuse me, Mr. Wiggin," Mr. Williams said, recovering himself with a great gulp.

"Nellie was my wife, Mr. Wiggin," he continued,

in a quieter tone. "I married her when she was twenty, and I was twenty-three. Probably I shouldn't have done it. Probably I took advantage of her. I've made allowance for that. You see, they didn't half treat her right at home. Her mother was an awful person, a tyrant; hated cards, and dancing, and going out with the fellows. Why, she was a perfect heathen! And the father was too limp to take the girl's part against the mother. I saw how it was in a minute. Home was hell to that girl, that was all. She was full of life—full of it as her cheeks were of red. I tell you, she was a wonderful, a wonderful girl, Mr. Wiggin, and no mistake. And I says to myself, I says, 'Here now, here's where we get together and do a bit in the life-saving line, that's what!' That girl needed to be taken out and given a taste of life, real life. She saw that herself, the minute I pointed it out to her. So we gave the old pair the slip and ran away. The old lady at home never got over it—cut the girl off without a penny. But I had salary enough for two, and even enough laid by to put up a little house. And we had two children, two boys, and everything was fine.

"But soon," the man now raced breathlessly on, leaning forward on his knee, "soon I began to snore—do you see? My hair got yellow; and I was 'homely as sin;' and I 'laughed like a horse;' and God knows what else! For a long time I couldn't make out what was the trouble; but she began to tell me. I just didn't suit at all. I 'couldn't talk good English;' I 'hadn't any brains.' That was the main

thing—I wasn't strong on brains. Neighbors would come in, and Nellie she could spin off a long string about the new novels, and could sing them all the new songs. All I could do was sit in a corner and grin and enjoy it—so she said. And she . . . she—”

Mr. Williams strode to a window and looked out into the darkness, for an excuse to turn his back. His self-control was slipping.

“She . . . she turned the children against me, too,” he stammered. “I didn't notice it at first, it was so gradual. But she did it, she did it!”

It did not in the least excuse his Nellie; and yet I have to own that, for all his grief, Mr. Williams was undeniably angular and unprepossessing. Somehow even his grief could not mellow the unbeautiful picture that he made. Yet with his next words I was all on the side of Mr. Williams.

He whisked about again. “But Nellie was right!” he almost shouted. “I knew she was right all along, even then. Only, what did cut me was that she never offered to help me out, to straighten me around. I tell you, that hurt. A little patience, a little hint here, or a suggestion there—it would have made all the difference in the world for me. Law, I was only too anxious to improve. But she only kept sort of proving, proving things against me. She seemed sort of glad when she found something new that was wrong with me. It was simply that she was proving to herself that I was out of the question, that was all. It . . . it cut me all up, that's what it did. Because—”

Here Mr. Williams suddenly went down on his knees at my desk, and flung his long arms across it; and all the homeliness that was the tragedy of his life groaned aloud in its pain.

"Because . . . O my God, I loved her, I loved her! There she was, just wo-o-nderful and beautiful, with her red cheeks and her saucy ways. There she was, in my house, and yet so far away. She'd got so I hardly dared speak to her. I loved her, I loved her—and couldn't have her. Do you know what that means?" Mr. Williams looked up at me fiercely. "Oh no, you don't; you're good-looking. But to see her there! Why, her mere voice was music. I used to stop and listen to it, when she was upstairs talking to the boys. Once she caught me at it, grin and all. Everything I did just made me out a worse fool than before. Why, it was awful! I used to lay awake—*lie* awake—nights, wondering what I could do to clear that awful muddle. Oh, sometimes I wanted to pull the whole d—n place down about our ears and bury us all together!" And in his distraction Mr. Williams made the motion of doing so, as he paused for breath.

"That was before I found out what was really the matter, Mr. Wiggin," Mr. Williams continued. He rose to his feet again, and tried to be calm. "But I found that out in the course of time! She'd . . . she'd seen another man! My shebang had got to be like what it was at home, d'you see? And . . . and that didn't make it any sweeter at home for me, Mr. Wiggin! Not much!"

Mr. Williams was silent for a space, remembering, and struggling to control himself. But the strain of his emotions was too great.

"O Nellie, Nellie!" he cried out; "forgive me for what I thought in them—in *those* days! God forgive me for what I felt like doing! But I couldn't help it—no man could!"

The man sank into a chair again. "But I came to see better," he struggled on. "It took me a long time—everything takes me a long time, that's the trouble. But I . . . I gave in at last, after three years of it. It wore me out. . . . God, how I hated that man at first! I wanted to kill him, he was so good-looking. He had money, too. He had everything that I had not. What right had he to all that! And I'd have bet anything on earth that he didn't love her the tenth part of the way I did. . . . But it wasn't any use for me. Three years of it—and I tried every way I knew to do my part. Then I gave in. The other fellow could send the boys away to school, and then to college; and a man wants his boys to get on, Mr. Wiggin. It took time, but in the end the divorce came easy. I let them prove desertion—and so she went away. . . ."

For a moment nothing was heard in my room but the dash of the rain against the windows and the heavy breathing of my strange guest.

"She went," he struggled on. "And of course I got out of the house too. It was no place for me. I locked it up tight, and never went near it for weeks.

"Somehow, anyhow, I crawled through those days,



just to get them behind me. I'd given in, but I hadn't given up. I thought it simply must be that love, real love, the kind that lasts through everything, would win out. That's what has made me hang on."

"That was a truly splendid thing to do, Mr. Williams," I said, trying to ease the way. It was all I could think of in my gathering astonishment.

"Then one day a great idea came to me," Mr. Williams went on, very properly without heed of me. "I roared out laughing when I thought of it, the thing was so simple. If it was true that I was a raw gawk, and had been all along, *why not spruce up*—and make a regular habit of sprucing up? Mind you, I had never thought of that before! So I tried my best to talk better. I practiced on the fellows at the office. I went to a tailor, and let him go it on me.

"And then came the notion of the house.

"The old place we'd lived in had always seemed to me a pretty first-class affair, till I plucked up courage and passed it one Sunday afternoon. It was rented by then, and I hated to see anybody else in it. But then it hit me for just what it was—that Sunday afternoon. Of *course* it was no place for Nellie! I saw that in a minute. And my stars, but I was happy to discover that! I was actually getting on, don't you see? Why, the world was a different place to me after I'd thought of that. I laid myself out to see what I could make of a new house. I hired a good architect and set him to work. I read books about houses, and wherever I saw a good point in other

houses that looked right, I'd take notes. Man, I was like a kid with a new toy about that new house. . . . But let me tell you, Mr. Wiggin,"—

Again Mr. Williams began pacing the floor, filled with this echo of his original enthusiasm. He waved his long forefinger at me, by way of emphasis.

"I guess you know I wasn't building that house merely to prove to myself that I was getting up some sort of taste. Hardly! Of course I could always rent it. But somehow I was always putting that off. You see, I'd thought a mighty lot by then. The years had gone by, and I said to myself, 'Now then, that other arrangement with the other fellow isn't going to last. That kind never does last. Nellie is going to see, one of these days, which one of us loves her best. She's going to come back. I know Nellie! And she'll be sure to pass that house of mine—sure as shootin'. Oh, I know Nellie! And she'll know in a minute what it's for—for *her*, of course! Who else!' You see what I was at, Mr. Wiggin?"

I murmured what assent I could, in my bewilderment.

"Well," Mr. Williams hurried on, "I spent two years fixing up that place. I staved off renting it, always, because in case Nellie came back it would have been awkward to have people—other people—settled in it, probably knocking it to pieces all the time. So the place soon gave folks something to jeer at. The fellows in the office chaffed me. 'Going to try your luck again, Williams?' they'd say. And I'd say, 'Yes, going to try my luck again.' And the

joke of it was, that's exactly what I was going to do—try my luck again! Only—”

Mr. Williams abruptly dropped from his exaltation. “Only,” he went on, more quietly, “here it is, after all these years . . . and,” he hesitated, “my luck hasn’t been any good. I did hear, some time ago, that the other chap was in poor health,”—he laughed, in an effort toward jocularity. “But . . . I guess . . . my house proposition was pretty foolish after all. The bait was there, but no fish. No wonder people jeered. I might have saved myself the trouble.

“But no,” he quickly interrupted himself, “not that I begrudged it—never! There was always the chance that she *might* come back and walk past. And anyhow, so long as I had to live on, that seemed to be the only way I could get through with it. That house and that chance were all I lived for. But I’ve waited nine years now. And if I’d known at the beginning that it was to be this long . . . with nothing at the end of it . . . well—” But Mr. Williams stopped, and squared his shoulders and faced me. “Well,” he said, “*I’d have done it anyhow!*” . . .

What could I say to such a man! This was something new, even in a clergyman’s experience. I never knew that such a heart could wear such a grotesque disguise. Without intellect, with nothing but a blind and desperate hope, this poor man had achieved a kind of greatness. I could only grasp his hand. “God bless you,” I tried to say, “but you’ve done a noble thing!”

But Mr. Williams waved me back. He was not yet ready for praise.

"You forget that," he said, quietly, pointing to the red-labelled bottle that he had laid on my desk. "Often enough I've sat alone in that house and thought, 'Oh, h—l, what's the use of this!' But I couldn't help thinking on—'Let's see; that boy Charley must be about . . . bless my soul, he's fifteen now, and must be a pretty husky specimen. Rides a pony, no doubt—and rides with the best of them. And there's Edgar—thirteen now.' And I'd wonder how he was. Edgar never was strong, poor boy. 'And Nellie must be pretty gray now,' I'd think. I *hoped* she was gray. I hoped she'd got wrinkled, so there wouldn't be such a gap between us. And so it was. I never got free of it—and never wanted to—till of late. Lately it was getting too much for me, all those empty rooms, and no prospect that they'd ever be filled the way I'd hoped they'd be, with the boys romping about, and Nellie there. I couldn't stand the emptiness. Time and again the ashes and bones proposition all but got the best of me. And this afternoon—"

I made some attempt to speak.

"But you saved my life, Mr. Wiggin," he interrupted. He came close to me, with a kind of awkward dignity, and laid his hand on my shoulder; and, astonished as I had been before, I have no ready name for the emotion he gave me then.

"Mr. Wiggin," he said, "this afternoon another bright idea came into my head. Funny I never

thought of it before." And then I felt his grasp of me tighten, and he looked at me with a singular sweetness. "You don't know what you have done for me, Mr. Wiggin," he said. "You . . . you've helped me to live. And now you've showed me something I never saw before. After all, that house of mine was a . . . a mere piece of fancy work, merely a way of showing off. But you gave me an idea this afternoon. I never knew it, but all this while I've been as useless as my house. Now you've given me something to do. I can't tell you what it means to me, and you must let me repay you in the only way I can. You see, I've noticed this before—"

He picked up my dear Margaret's photograph from its place on my desk; and with a rush his old shyness returned as he did so.

"I think I understand how things are going here," Mr. Williams smiled, tapping the photograph. "Before long"—he hesitated, in growing embarrassment, in distrust of his own fine sentiments, "before long you'll be needing a house, you two—won't you? Well, then—won't you take mine?"

Somehow Mr. Williams had made my room too small for us. The rain had eased off, and this time with a better reason for wishing to be rid of him—for I felt so uncomfortably small—I once more took my strange guest for a walk.

This time it was Mr. Williams who supplied the conversation—though he spoke more to himself than to me. With the night to cloak his shyness he grew

voluble. To see his house in use at last, he said, would give him almost the joy he had been ten years awaiting. To see me installed there was so nearly like what he had wished for himself that it would seem almost the same.

As for me, I was stunned by this extraordinary experience, and yet ashamed of my surprise. All the same, for all the new things he had given me to think of, I too was visited with an "idea."

What of the woman? Surely I could not, without helping him, allow this hungry man only to help me. Perhaps I may never find her for him. But to succeed in that I could give Mr. Williams his house again—yes, almost without a pang!

## **Ad Finem**

By MAHLON LEONARD FISHER

The face of Age is stained with dateless tears.  
The treacherous tides of Time, uprising fast  
Against her temple steps, submerge the Past  
Beneath the scum of used and useless years.  
A sound and ominous assails the ears  
Of such as waken, wondering, out of dream—  
The sound of plummets plunging in a stream:  
It is Eternity the listener hears,  
Heaving the dreadful lead in 'bysmal seas  
Unfathomable already. Chilled to stone,  
The wakened sleepers catch, from coasts unknown,  
The prescient creak of oars on every breeze,  
And frightened cries from ports unwharved, im-  
mense,  
And awful auguries of imminence!

## The Midland Library

*The End of the Road* is the title of a story contributed to the *May Forum* by Walter J. Muilenburg. The *wanderlust* theme is given new vitality by a tragically realistic treatment and a faithful portrayal of a middlewestern background.

The Middle West is in need of such books as *The Dune Country*. (By Earl H. Reed. John Lane Company.) Only by such productions can a region become cognizant of itself, of its varying adjustments, differing flavors, discrete peculiarities, and common substratum. Mr. Reed has worked well in this needed task, and while not producing a masterpiece, has presented us with a book interesting and significant. He has, in words and in etchings, described and interpreted that desolate scimiter of dune country that slowly shifts along the southern end of Lake Michigan. Not only is the land depicted, but the wild life, and predominantly, the human derelicts which characterize this country as much as the sands. The country itself is more adequately interpreted in the etchings than in the prose accompanying them, but the reverse of this holds with the characters Mr. Reed describes. The etchings of the dunes are remarkably well done, and would alone justify the book; they have unique atmosphere, skillful technique and right feeling. Mr. Reed's prose style is not so good; he is a little too explicitly concerned with "inspiration" and "the divine" instead of letting these things announce themselves. The book itself is tastefully put up, and on the whole, with its content of etchings and interpretation, is most acceptable and commendable.



